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ABSTRACT

The Educational Think Tank for Northern Pinal County was established in order to discover the educational needs of the people in the community, improve links between educational entities, and improve the public perception of educational systems in Pinal County at all levels. The group's role was to create ideas for others to execute, which was achieved in five meetings. At the first meeting, the group got acquainted, perfected membership, and established rules and formats. Meeting 2 included writing a mission statement, reporting on relevant information gathered, and brainstorming about perceived needs and ideas. Meeting 3 included focusing ideas and drafting a set of recommendations. The fourth meeting involved perfecting and disseminating recommendations. At the final meeting, the group reported the impact of recommendations presented, conducted evaluations, and decided the fate of the group. (YKH)

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ED 420 350

Educational Think Tank for Northern Pinal County: A Unique Community-Wide Approach to Academic Needs Assessment and Program Planning

A Report to the Central Arizona College Governing Board April, 1998

Presented by

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Central Arizona College-Superstition Mountain Campus

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Introduction

At the beginning of the 1997-1998 school year, Dr. Joanna Michelich, Dean of Central Arizona College-Superstition Mountain Campus [CAC-SMC], asked two faculty members to help develop ideas for magnet programs or other areas to help build the college's programs and enrollment. In responding to the Dean's assignment, Dr. Leslie Alexander and Dr. Jeff Ross [the leaders] created a focus group of community leaders to explore opportunities for enhancing CAC's course offerings. The group's specific objective was to articulate ways in which CAC might work with the state universities' outreach components, the local school district, the part of city government involved in education, and the local business community. CAC-SMC hoped to coordinate activities, share resources, and help further a mutually-supportive environment in which current and future teachers could train and work.

Overview

What worked well for us were three components:

1) A simple 5-meeting format that did not require a huge commitment of time or energy from volunteers.
   Meeting 1
      Get acquainted
      Perfect group membership
      Establish group purpose, meeting format, and rules
   Meeting 2
      Write a mission statement
      Report on relevant information gathered
      Brainstorm about perceived needs, resources, ideas
   Meeting 3
      Cull, sharpen, and focus ideas
      Draft a set of recommendations
   Meeting 4
      Perfect recommendations
      Plan to present and disseminate recommendations
   Meeting 5
      Report impact of recommendations presented
      Evaluate product, process, and progress
      Decide fate of group

2) Assurance that this group was supposed to create ideas for others to carry out, not enslave themselves for years.
3) Willingness on the part of the two leaders to work hard between meetings to summarize the group's work and keep the group moving forward a little bit each time it met.

Results

After our 5th meeting, the Think Tank decided to disband and regroup itself next year around their recommendations and suggested projects. Preliminary contacts were made before the school year ended to begin setting up some task forces to carry our ideas forward.

Creating the North Pinal County Education Think Tank

1. The CAC-SMC Campus Dean, at her annual administrative team retreat, led a plus/delta discussing regarding the campus' general strength and weaknesses.

2. The campus management team met and identified 4 topics/areas, which seemed to have potential for becoming magnet programs.

3. Campus Dean assigned each potential magnet program topic to a small team of professionals with interest in exploring and developing the topic. The Dean also attached a clerical support person to each of the teams.

4. The charge from the Dean included:
   - A. Conduct an analysis to establish need for new curriculum.
   - B. Where occupational areas are involved, the basis of curriculum design must be the knowledge and skills required for employment or advancement in the program field. (Knowledge and skills are to be determined by employers.)
   - C. Where articulation to a university is involved, the statewide rules for transfer to lower division credits to upper division status must be considered.
   - D. Before proposals are presented to the Dean, a study of the college's resources must be made to demonstrate adequate infrastructure to support new curriculum.
   - E. Before proposals are presented to the Vice President for Instruction at CAC, analysis of the impact of the new curriculum upon other districts must be measured and presented to the Dean. The Dean created a mission statement for the investigative teams.
   - To research, explore, and to recommend potential academic/vocational courses and/or programs of study in each of the general areas,
   - To conduct feasibility studies and/or needs assessment in each of the general areas,
   - To identify talent pools, job markets, job prospects,
   - To identify necessary human, facility, and equipment resources needed and a timeline necessary for implementation;
   - To determine potential market niches and competition for training,
   - To identify appropriate certifying commissions/boards and processes necessary for implementation,
   - To prepare a preliminary report with recommendations by March 1998.

5 As the persons assigned the job of exploring a teacher education alliance, the leaders met and created a list of those persons who needed to be invited. In creating this list, the leaders were guided by two ideas: 1) Invitees should be active in either some aspect of teacher preparation/continuing education or other organized activities with school aged children in the community; 2) The invitees should not be the busiest, most high-profile persons in the community.

6 Dr. Alexander sketched out a 5-meeting format for completing the assignment. She determined to 1) keep the number of meetings small, 2) schedule the meetings around the natural rhythm of the school year; 3) initiate something new and different at each meeting; 4) be sure to assign tasks at each meeting; 5) provide closure at the last meeting.

7 The two leaders drafted a letter of invitation to the first investigative team meeting. They gave their letter draft and list of invitees to the Dean so that the letter would bear her signature and status in the community.

8 A clerical support person was asked to call and verify attendance at all the meetings. The leaders decided it would be fine if some invitees never came to meetings as long as they requested a copy of the minutes or otherwise indicated a desire to be involved.

9 The Dean came only to the first meeting to greet participants, thank them for participation, and officially hand over the project to the leaders. At that meeting, the group made some important decisions.

- To follow the proposed 5-meeting format (thereby limiting commitment)
- To start on time, end on time, have a different agenda for each meeting, and never to meet for more than an hour and a half.
- To work together to create ideas and not worry excessively about how the ideas might be implemented. (It was necessary during the five meetings to remind members their role was to THINK, not to ACT!)

Doing the Work

10 At each meeting, we kept our promises. Each time we met, we

- Provided a written agenda
- Started on time
- Ended on time
- Decided on or next meeting agenda before leaving
- Sent copies of minutes to those who wanted them but could not come to meetings as well as those who had attended.
- Incorporated into the next meeting comments received by phone/memo from those who could not attend.
- Brought in something from the two leaders to be edited at each meeting to keep the group moving forward.
- Provided refreshments

11. The 5-meeting format included

Meeting 1—late September: get acquainted receive the charge from the Dean, perfect the meeting invitation list, discuss purpose, outline meeting format, set our 5 meeting dates, and establish the meeting rules. Homework: Gather information relevant to the group's purpose and consider their mission statement. The leaders drafted a rough mission statement to share with the group at meeting 2.

Meeting 2—mid October: create the group name [Educational Think Tank for Northern Pinal County], write the group's mission statement, present reports of relevant information gathered by each group member, brainstorm resources and ways of connecting people and organizations who are committed in the target areas, make initial recommendations.

The Group's Mission Statement:

A. Improve links between educational systems in the community
B. Institute a fact-finding mission to discover educational needs of all learners in the community.
C. Designate/expand opportunities to work with young people at all levels in the community.
D. Improve relations with public for all educational institutions.

Meeting 3—mid November: report feedback and reactions gathered by each member, cull, sharpen and focus ideas generated in the "voices" of the community, begin to refine and synthesize a set of recommendations about how people and organizations in the community can work together to further the Think Tank's purposes.

Homework: The leaders prepare a set of recommendations to be reviewed by all participants before the next meeting. The members are to plan ways to disseminate recommendations or present them to the power brokers among each Think Tank's member's constituency.

Since the school year was approaching the winter holidays, the group planned not to meet again until late February. However, we asked each member review the recommendations drafted by the leaders and call or write back to them with their comments, criticisms, and suggestions by the second weeks of February.

Before meetings 3 and 4, the leaders drafted an initial set of recommendations by grouping ideas from the notes taken at meeting 3 and fleshing them out based on discussions at all the previous meetings. This produced a 5-page document.

Few of the members respected our timeline and there was a last minute flurry of work on the part of the two leaders two days before meeting 4.

Meeting 4—late February: finish editing and fleshing out recommendations, plan dates and determine what persons will be contacted for presenting or disseminating the recommendations to each member's home organization. Homework: Each Think Tank member to make a presentation based on the developed recommendations.

The clerical support for the Think Tank had to be expanded in order to produce a professional-appearing document. When the document was ready, copies were give to each member of the Think Tank to use in their presentations. The leaders made a presentation to the Dean, Vice President for Instruction, the President, and the College Governing Board. A copy of the text of the document [**Education Think Tank for Northern Pinal County Recommendations**] follows.

Meeting 5—late March: report back to Think Tank about presentations, reactions to ideas and impact of ideas, evaluate process, product and progress as a group, decided whether to disband, regroup or quit.

Co-Chairpersons
Leslie Alexander (CAC-SMC)
Jeff Ross (CAC-SMC)

Members
Lin Andresen (NAU student)
Sherrie Davis (AJUSD)
Rosanna Lippe (elementary school teacher)
Tom Johnson (AJUSD)
Joanna Jones (NAU in AJ)
Cheryl Foster (CAC-SPC)
John Paddison (CAC-SPC)
Terry Ackland (CAC-AVC)
Sharon Moeller (NAU in AJ)
Lyle Dalby (AJUSD)
Jan Bried (NAU student)
Larry LaPrise (AJUSD)
Liz Langenbach (City of AJ)

Prepared By
Dianne Welsh
Chrissy Vande Krol

Mission Statement

The Education Think Tank for Northern Pinal County is established at the behest of Dr. Joanna Michelich of Central Arizona College, Superstition Mountain Campus for the purpose of:

*discovering the educational needs of the people in the community.

*improving links between existing educational systems in Pinal County to enhance sharing of information, resources, ideas and opportunities to work with young people at all levels within the community.

*establishing links between educational systems in Pinal County and other entities, whether private or public, to improve opportunities for employed and retired teachers, students of education, public and private school students, parents and children of the community and other interested parties to share facilities and other resources, information, and opportunities to work directly with young people at all levels within the community.

*improve the public perception of educational systems in Pinal County at all levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. EMPLOYED TEACHERS IN APACHE JUNCTION SCHOOLS NEED:

- basic computer usage courses incorporating Internet skills such as electronic resources which use hands-on training.
- knowledge and familiarity with software which is applicable to teachers' needs (e g taking attendance, calculating grades or doing research)
- competency in taking information from the Internet, software, etc. and integrating it into teaching materials
- courses and workshops offered in late afternoon (after school), in evenings or on weekends)
- courses and workshops offered in convenient locations and tied to the needs of each community such as Apache Junction, Queen Creek and Superior
- programs eligible for E-rate funding which might be used to bring technology to the schools through matching federal funds
- guidelines for infusing multi-cultural awareness into classes in technology; and for selecting computer software and other materials which are culturally sensitive

2. EMPLOYED TEACHERS NEED HELP FULFILLING THE NEW STATE CERTIFICATION MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS (30 HR/; YEAR OR 180 HRS OVER 6 YEARS). TO ACCOMPLISH THIS WE NEED:

- Linkage of public school staff development training with courses and workshops at AJUSD, CAC, NAU, etc.
- short term courses in computer technology such as enumerated in #1 above
- short term courses centered on updated curriculum models and current educational research (which is more intensive than public school inservice activities may be expected to offer), offered by name-recognition presenters
- short term courses specializing in childrens' literature and adolescents' literature and teachers as readers
- short term courses specializing in teachers as classroom researchers
- short term courses which result in the production of teacher-ready units in cultural diversity and celebrations of culture
- short term courses which focus on math skills useful at casinos (e g. could be OE/OX format for senior citizen pop. too)
- courses should provide or result in teacher-ready instructional units (yet note theoretical orientations and tied to educational research)
- easy access to Masters' level and Doctoral entry level courses
- teacher support as classroom researcher, applied academics, etc.

3. **APACHE JUNCTION UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NEEDS:**

- community-based programs which enhance certain attitudes and skills among the population of prospective as well as currently employed teachers. Specifically, there is a need for communication and interpersonal skills, training in group dynamics, sensitivity to multiculturalism and valuing our unique community
- business partnerships with companies like Motorola and Intel (similar to the School To Work partnerships in existence at Red Mountain HS and other schools) which supply schools with equipment and train workers appropriately for the valley work force.
- Mini conferences or Think Tank Teams developed for promoting communication among community college administrators, school superintendents and CEO's of businesses for sharing information, ideas and resources

4. **TEACHERS AND PARENTS OF SPECIAL STUDENTS IN THE COMMUNITY NEED:**

- Teacher-Ready resources for working with special needs students (from Learning Disabled to Gifted) with multicultural sensitivity built in
- Research-Based information available in short, easy-to-digest packages about what methods and techniques are most effective in working with special needs identified above.
- Information, training and resources for fund-raising on behalf of special students
- Opportunities to work with professionals who specialize in working with special and culturally different children
- Opportunities to work with locally represented agencies which specialize in services to special students
- Information and human resources for understanding the legal realities and interpretations of the laws governing special needs.
- Information and practice dealing with the ethical dilemmas frequently encountered in working on behalf of special needs
- Opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, cooperation and communication about how to give special needs students help that does not hinder their progress

5. **THE NORTHERN PINAL COUNTY COMMUNITIES NEED:**

- Activities and events which promote multicultural sensitivity and awareness among its community members by infusing this goal into other aspects of the community life such as:
  - ⇒ artists-in-residence programs
  - ⇒ oral history projects and celebrations
  - ⇒ community-wide projects (e.g. painting a mural)
  - ⇒ cultural celebrations
- Programs which emphasize communication and interpersonal skills, training in group dynamics, multiculturalism and communitarianism
- Ways to link AJUSD and other school districts and CAC to enhance socioeconomic diversity in the communities
- Ways to develop retired teachers in the community as a resource for schools, parents and students
- Opportunities for Service Learning (for college credit) which would involve working in task groups, group dynamics, communitarianism, and multicultural awareness
- More NAU Outreach programs, such as at CAC's Aravaipa Campus

6. **THE PEOPLE OF NORTHERN PINAL COUNTY COMMUNITIES NEED A CHILDRENS' THEATRE:**

- to provide linkage among NAU and CAC classes in Childrens' Literature, Adolesent Literature, Teaching Methods, etc. and educational opportunities for children, prospective teachers, parents and community members
- that would facilitate transfer to NAU's ART and HUM requirements for a B.A. in Elementary Education from CAC and other community colleges (e.g. NAU cohorts)
- that provides a training ground for prospective elementary education teachers with the kind of work experience which will be required of applicants to teacher education in Fall 1998 at all 3 Arizona universities
- which might involve artists and groups already in existence such as
  - ⇒ ASU's Don Doyle, a story teller
  - ⇒ the Cowboy Poets
  - ⇒ Poetry Jam
  - ⇒ Oral History Project
  - ⇒ City of AJ Parks & Recreation
  - ⇒ ASU Art Teachers' Guild
  - ⇒ AZ Commission on the Arts

7. THE NAU COHORTS AND OTHER PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS NEED:

- ♦ a review of CAC curriculum in relation to NAU arts and humanities requirements to facilitate transfer to NAU teacher education program (e.g. ART and HUM prefix classes)
- ♦ commitment from NAU and CAC to course offering schedules which students can count on to fulfill requirements
- ♦ development of CAC practica or career classes for future teachers to provide opportunities for real classroom exposure very early in training program places such as:

⇒ City of Apache Junction Parks & Recreation programs
⇒ City of Apache Junction Open Gym Program
⇒ Child Care Centers
⇒ Charter Schools
⇒ Religion Affiliated Private Schools
⇒ Childrens' Theatre

- ♦ exploration of ways in which CAC students can be better prepared for working in university and profession task groups
- ♦ convenient access in terms of location and scheduling for classes taught at other than NAU which they need to fulfill requirements
- ♦ a database of Certified and effective teachers to teach courses for NAU in the local communities
- ♦ further development of an articulated early care and education career pathway